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ABSTRACT

Changes in the percentage representation of women among recipients of first professional degrees are examined between the academic years 1970-71 and 1975-76. The data were collected through the annual Survey of Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred. A first professional degree is one that "signifies completion of the academic requirements for beginning practice in a given profession." Eight professions are considered: dentistry, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatry, veterinary medicine, law, and theology. While women increased their percentage representation in all eight of these professions, they still constitute a distinct minority in all fields, and available enrollment data suggest that these trends will continue. Data are presented on the percentage of women among first year enrollments in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and law for each year from 1971 to 1976. Women's percentage representation among first-year enrollments increased every year from 1971 through 1976. Data are presented on the relative popularity of the various fields among women seeking a first professional degree, and comparative data for men are presented. Based on the 1976 data, pharmacy is the field in which women are most highly represented, and the fields of law and medicine together account for 86 percent of all first professional degrees awarded to women in 1976. Appendices provide data on the numbers and percentages of degrees awarded to women by professional field for each year from 1970-71 through 1975-76. (SE)

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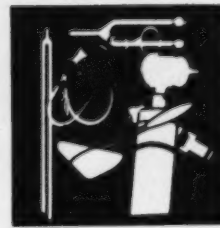
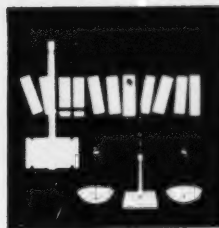
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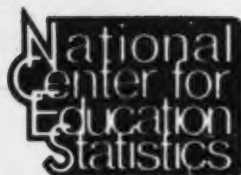


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FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREE AWARDS TO WOMEN



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by

George H. Brown

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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FIRST PROFESSIONAL DEGREE AWARDS TO WOMEN

by

George H. Brown

This brief report is the fourth in a series concerned with changing trends in degree awards to women. Earlier reports focused on doctoral, master's, and bachelor's degrees. The data on which these reports are based were collected through the annual Survey of Degrees and Other Formal Awards Conferred [part of the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS)].

A first professional degree is one that "signifies completion of the academic requirements for beginning practice in a given profession..." This report examines changes, between the academic years 1970-71 and 1975-76, in the percentage representation of women among recipients of first professional degrees. For convenience, each academic year is referred to by the year in which it ends; e.g., 1971. Degree award data for the years between 1971 and 1976 are presented in the appendix.

Traditionally, NCES has collected data on degree awards in eight professions: dentistry, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatry, veterinary medicine, law and theology. The small number of degrees awarded in other professions were grouped into an "other" category. By 1976, pharmacy and chiropractic had grown sufficiently to merit separate reporting status and were therefore removed from the "other" category. It is obviously not possible to include these two professions when comparing degree awards in 1971 and 1976.

Table 1 shows the percentage representation of women among first professional degree recipients in 1971 and 1976, and also shows the gains in percentage points between these years. It is immediately apparent that women made at least modest gains in all eight fields. The largest were in law (12 percentage points) and veterinary medicine (10 percentage points). It is not possible to compute the gains in pharmacy and chiropractic since in the earlier year these were subsumed in the "other" category. It is interesting to note, however, that in 1976 the percentage representation of women was higher in pharmacy than in

any other field (30 percentage points).^{1/}

Table 1.--Percentages of women among recipients of first professional degrees: Aggregate United States, 1971 and 1976

Field	1971		1976		Change in percentage points
	Total degrees	Percent awarded to women	Total degrees	Percent awarded to women	
Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.).....	3,777	1.2	5,478	4.5	3.3
Medicine (M.D.).....	8,986	9.2	13,540	16.2	7.0
Optometry (O.D.).....	531	2.4	975	7.7	5.3
Osteopathic medicine (D.O.).....	472	2.3	818	7.2	4.9
Podiatry or podiatric medicine (Pod.D.)	240	2.1	428	2.6	0.5
Veterinary medicine (D.V.M.).....	1,252	7.8	1,532	18.1	10.3
Law, general (L.L.B. or J.D.).....	17,652	7.3	32,535	19.2	11.9
Theological professions, general.....	5,055	2.3	5,709	7.6	5.3
Other.....	311	21.2	30	10.0	
Pharmacy (D.Pharm.)			439	29.6	
Chiropractic (D.C.)			1,577	9.3	
Total	38,276	6.5	63,061	15.6	9.1

The general conclusion to be drawn from table 1 is that while women have increased their percentage representation in all eight of the professions for which trends could be examined, they still constitute a distinct minority in all fields. They are most highly represented in pharmacy (30 percentage points); law (19 percentage points); veterinary medicine (18 percentage points); and medicine (16 percentage points). Although none of the professions here under discussion can be regarded as traditionally female, it is conceivable that pharmacy is on its way to becoming such.

Whether the trends described above will continue cannot be forecast with certainty, although the available data regarding enrollment of women in first professional degree programs suggest that these trends will indeed continue. First year enrollment data are available only with respect to four fields: medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and law. Table 2 shows, for each year 1971-1976, the percentage of women among first year enrollments in each of these fields.

^{1/}

It should be explained that the vast majority of pharmacists enter the field by earning a bachelor's degree in pharmacy (which is not a first professional degree) and then serving in an assistant or apprentice capacity for 1 year before taking their licensing examination. In 1976, a total of 7,018 bachelor's degrees in pharmacy were awarded; of these, 30 percent were awarded to women.

Table 2.--Percentages of women among first-year enrollments in four first professional degree programs: Aggregate United States, 1971 through 1976

Field	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Law	8.8	11.6	15.7	19.8	23.4	25.9
Medicine	10.9	13.1	16.3	19.0	22.4	23.4
Dentistry	2.2	3.1	4.0	6.9	10.9	12.2
Veterinary medicine	11.0	15.1	18.6	23.0	25.3	28.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Education Statistics, Students Enrolled for Advanced Degrees, 1970-1976 editions, Washington, D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office.

It is clear that for each of these fields, women's percentage representation among first-year enrollments increased every year from 1971 through 1976. Increased enrollments should be reflected in increased degree awards upon program completion. Since, however, program lengths vary both within and among fields, and since some attrition occurs, it is not possible to forecast exactly what percentage women will constitute of future degree recipients. It seems safe to say, however, that these percentages will continue to grow for at least the next few years.

The discussion thus far has focused on the extent to which women have been represented among recipients of first professional degrees. It may also be of interest to consider the relative popularity of the various fields among women seeking a first professional degree.

Table 3 presents information relevant to this point and, for comparison purposes, gives analogous data for men. It will surprise no one to observe that law was the most popular field for both sexes, and for both years being considered. In 1976, 63 percent of the female first professional degree recipients obtained their degree in law. This was up about 11 percentage points over 1971. The second most popular field was medicine (22 percent), down from 33 percent in 1971. Thus, medicine is declining somewhat in popularity among women, while law continues to make substantial gains. (Much the same statement can be made with respect to the men's data).

It is impressive to observe that these two fields (law and medicine) together account for 86 percent of all first professional degrees awarded to women. This is indeed a high concentration.

With respect to men also, law and medicine were the most popular fields, 49 percent and 21 percent, respectively. These two fields together account for 70 percent of the men degree recipients in 1976. Other fields which accounted for appreciable percentages of the men's choices were dentistry and theological professions, each accounting for 10 percent. Men are somewhat more diversified than women in their choice of profession.

Table 3.--Distribution of first professional degrees among fields for men and for women: Aggregate United States, 1971 and 1976

Field	Percentages of degrees awarded			
	Women		Men	
	1971	1976	1971	1976
Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.)	1.8	2.5	10.4	10.0
Medicine (M.D.)	33.4	22.3	22.9	21.3
Optometry (O.D.)	0.5	0.8	1.4	1.7
Osteopathic medicine (D.O.)	0.4	0.6	1.4	1.4
Podiatry or podiatric medicine (Pod.D.)	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.8
Veterinary medicine (D.V.M.)	4.0	2.8	3.2	2.4
Law, general	52.2	63.5	46.2	49.4
Theological professions, general	4.8	4.4	13.8	9.9
Other	2.7	*	0.7	*
Pharmacy (D.Pharm.)		1.3		0.6
Chiropractic (D.C.)		1.5		2.7
Total percentages	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total degrees	2,479	8,851	35,797	52,210

* Less than 0.1 percent.

The most interesting findings in this report may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Women increased their percentage representation in all 8 of the fields for which trends could be examined.
- (2) Available enrollment data suggest that these trends will continue.
- (3) In the latest (1976) data, pharmacy is the field in which women are most highly represented, accounting for 30 percent of all recipients of the Doctor of Pharmacy degree.
- (4) The fields of law and medicine together account for 86 percent of all first professional degrees awarded to women in 1976.

APPENDIX

Appendix.-Percentages of women among recipients

	1970-71		1971-72		1972-73	
	Total degrees	Percent women	Total degrees	Percent women	Total degrees	Percent women
Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.)	3,077	1.2	3,894	1.2	4,086	1.4
Medicine (M.D.)	8,986	9.2	9,331	9.0	10,398	9.0
Optometry (O.D.)	531	2.4	670	2.2	771	2.6
Osteopathic medicine (D.O.)	472	2.3	484	3.5	523	2.9
Podiatry or podiatric medicine (Pod.D.)	240	2.1	279	.3	278	.3
Veterinary medicine (D.V.M.)	1,252	7.8	1,247	9.4	1,299	10.2
Law, general (L.L.B. or J.D.)	17,652	7.3	22,017	7.2	27,484	8.1
Theological professions, general	5,055	2.3	5,568	1.9	5,291	3.4
Other	311	21.2	284	20.8	305	11.8
Pharmacy (D.Pharm.)						
Chiropractic (D.C.)						
Total	38,276	6.5	43,774	6.3	50,435	7.1

of first professional degrees: 1971-1976

1973-74		1974-75		1975-76	
Total degrees	Percent women	Total degrees	Percent women	Total degrees	Percent women
4,478	2.0	4,809	3.1	5,478	4.5
11,447	11.2	12,550	13.2	13,540	16.2
791	4.2	792	5.0	975	7.7
685	2.8	665	5.3	818	7.2
371	1.1	351	1.1	428	2.6
1,384	11.2	1,415	15.9	1,532	18.1
29,652	11.5	29,497	15.1	32,535	19.2
5,048	5.5	5,098	6.8	5,709	7.6
422	26.1	1,082	11.0	30	10.0
				439	29.6
				1,577	9.3
54,278	9.9	56,259	12.5	63,061	15.6